

# 12 RESPONDING TO CHANGE OVER FOLLOWING A PLAN

## 12.1 EMBRACE CHANGE

In this section we will look at how change can be embraced in an Agile environment and describe a few change management models that are useful in supporting change on an organisational level.

### 12.1.1 Embracing change whilst delivering a product

It was Heraclitus who said ‘The only thing that is constant is change’; this is particularly true in complicated and complex environments. Therefore, in Agile deliveries, teams need to adopt practices that enable a knowledge–discovery process and allow them to take corrective action as they identify detailed requirements and technology needs.

This means that teams need to embrace change and make it a core part of the process rather than see it as an external source that needs to be resisted – basically they need to ‘be Agile’ and have an understanding of why they should embrace the principles described in this book, most specifically the following:

- Implementing the Agile mind-set (see [Section 2.1](#)).
- Understanding environments and their suitability for Agile (see [Section 2.2](#)).
- How to work in uncertain and volatile environments (see [Section 2.5](#)).
- How the Agile process supports change (see [Chapter 5](#)).
- How the Agile roles support change (see [Chapter 6](#)).
- Stories and continuous backlog refinement enable continuous change (see [Section 7.1](#)).
- Customer collaboration is key to effectively embracing the right changes (see [Section 11.1](#)).
- MSCW prioritisation enables focus on the most important changes (see [Section 7.1.4](#)).
- Short feedback loops allow for changes to be identified and implemented effectively (see [Section 8.1](#)).
- Documentation emerges as change occurs (see [Section 8.6](#)).
- Monitoring change through daily stand-ups (see [Section 8.3](#)), show and tells (see [Section 8.4](#)), retrospectives (see [Section 8.5](#)) and visual boards (see [Section 8.7](#)).
- Design emerges as the understanding of the product evolves (see [Section 9.2](#)).
- Agile plans change as the understanding of the product evolves (see [Section 7.3](#)).
- Change should occur at a sustainable pace (see [Section 8.8](#)).

## **12.1.2 Embracing change organisationally**

There are a number of change models that can help Agile team leads and organisations as a whole to think about behaviours that enable change to be welcomed rather than feared, and that are effective in initiating and driving a transformation to Agile.

### ***12.1.2.1 The 11 paradoxes of leadership***

Agile operates within variable environments, which requires leaders to embrace mechanisms and approaches to continuously drive change. Modern leadership is a balancing act between contradictory elements: managers should focus on short- and long-term goals, take into consideration global and local issues, inspire teamwork yet encourage individual accountability and promote their vision while following a pragmatic path.

The 11 Paradoxes of Leadership, which were defined by Dr Paul Evans at Lego (Evans, 2000), propose that modern change leaders should ideally have the following management and leadership skills:

1. To be able to build a close relationship with one's staff, and to keep a suitable distance.
2. To be able to lead, and to hold oneself in the background.
3. To trust one's staff, and to keep an eye on what is happening.
4. To be tolerant, and to know how you want things to function.
5. To keep the goals of one's department in mind, and at the same time to be loyal to the whole firm.
6. To do a good job of planning your own time, and to be flexible with your schedule.
7. To freely express your view, and to be diplomatic.
8. To be a visionary, and to keep one's feet on the ground.
9. To try to win consensus, and to be able to cut through.
10. To be dynamic, and to be reflective.
11. To be sure of yourself, and to be humble.

In an Agile environment, the Agile lead is the person who needs to consider a variety of often contradictory perspectives to manage change successfully, so an understanding of the 11 paradoxes is a useful checklist. They also provide a good reference list for the Agile team lead to highlight Agile-enabling behaviours for leaders in the organisation.

### ***12.1.2.2 Kotter's eight-step model***

Kotter's (1996) eight-step model is about enabling organisations to react successfully to opportunities, understanding the drivers behind change, and strengthening information flow across the organisation.

- **Establish a sense of urgency** This significant stage is often overlooked by change leaders. Through effective and bi-directional communication, leaders should outline the challenges in today's competition landscape, provide potential future scenarios, and understand the current state of their organisation:
  - complacency: failure to react to signs that action must be taken;
  - false urgency: focus on action that does not contribute to the desired goal;
  - true urgency: focus on action that adds value. Urgency should be driven by the belief that the macro-environment contains great opportunities, yet great hazards as well.
- **Form a powerful guiding coalition** Developing the right vision, disseminating the appropriate messages across the organisation, mitigating risk and shifting the organisational culture to new levels requires close collaboration, significant levels of trust and common goals amongst members of a power group. The formed coalition should:
  - be in a position of power to avoid impediments;
  - have expertise to make informed decisions;
  - have sufficient credibility to be accepted by the workforce;
  - be proven leaders to successfully drive change.
- **Create a new vision** Creating a clear vision facilitates the change process. A successful vision should reflect the following six qualities:
  - imaginable;
  - desirable;
  - feasible;
  - focused;
  - flexible;
  - communicable.

In addition, a vision and its underlying strategies contribute to three significant purposes:

- influences the nature of numerous decisions at lower levels in an organisational hierarchy;
  - creates a suitable environment and motivates employees to take action in line with the specified vision;
  - facilitates the coordination between various groups of people.
- **Communicate the vision** To minimise ambiguity, under-commitment and inconsistencies, change leaders should communicate the vision, underlying strategies and new behaviours across multiple communication channels and to the entire organisation. Kotter emphasises the importance of engaging

dialogues, sessions and workshops between visionary leaders, senior management and the rest of the organisation. Communication about the transformation should follow four simple rules; it should be:

- simple;
  - vivid;
  - repeatable;
  - invitational.
- **Empower others to act on the vision** Internal structures, resource defragmentation and impeding procedures can inhibit transformation incentives to progress sufficiently. These barriers should be removed promptly to allow empowered individuals to experiment. In addition, special attention should be paid to narrow-minded middle management, whose personal agenda may be in direct conflict with the transformation goals.
  - **Plan for and create short-term wins** Low-hanging fruits, short-term visible improvements and quick wins are encouraged during the first stages of a change initiative. The guiding coalition should identify and promote these quick wins in a visible and unambiguous manner. Through vivid communication, such success proves that personal sacrifices, difficulties and struggles caused by the transformation are paying off.
  - **Consolidate improvement and produce still more change** Fighting resistance during both early and mature stages of the change process should be one of the primary concerns. Even after declared victories, those who resist the change may withdraw, reappearing unexpectedly at a later stage. To avoid losing positive momentum, leadership is invaluable during this stage: recognising and rewarding individuals and teams that work towards the vision should be strongly considered.
  - **Institutionalise new approaches** Regressing towards old behaviours, practices and processes should be expected, in particular if new practices have not been routed effectively in the new organisational culture. To sustain the change, the majority of the organisation should be convinced that the new status quo is superior to the old one. Change leadership should ensure that embracing the new approaches will benefit the organisation in its entirety.

#### ***12.1.2.3 J-curve change model***

Throughout change initiatives, organisations exhibit particular behaviour patterns, which can be categorised in five stages, based on the J-curve change model:

1. plateau;
2. cliff;
3. valley;
4. ascent;
5. mountaintop.

During the **plateau** stage, business operations follow common patterns without any disruptions. After the introduction of a change initiative, the organisation goes through the **cliff** stage, feeling anxious and stressed due to the unknown future. At this point, leadership should provide assurances that the change initiative is heading towards the right direction and that discomfort because of change is expected.

In the **valley** stage, productivity drops significantly, as employees feel demotivated. Frustration reaches peak levels, in alignment with lack of confidence towards the new processes and behaviours. It is considered typical that employees denounce the change similar to 'this is never going to work'. The dip, also known as the **valley of death** (VoD), should be treated with extra care, as mismanagement may have a cascading effect to the rest of the organisation. As the organisation starts realising the positive outcomes from the change initiative, leadership should communicate the added value and benefits across the board.

During the **ascent** stage, change agents and other contributors should be recognised for their services of fighting against resistance and implementing the change. This will give a clear sign of approval, which will minimise any regression to the previous status quo, processes and behaviours.

The final stage, **mountaintop**, celebrates a new environment of improvement, with productivity and performance at higher levels in comparison to the plateau. This incremental change will motivate employees to keep changing their operations to achieve better results.

In an Agile environment, change leaders embrace the concepts behind the J-curve change model in order to introduce change. Frequently, change strategies are split into more manageable change initiatives, which will introduce less disruption at the team and organisational level. By sequencing such change initiatives, the final outcome is multiple J-curves following one another.